

**STATEMENT OF MARK REY
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS**

June 17, 2008

CONCERNING

S. 3045, Kenai Mountains-Turnagain Arm National Forest Heritage Area

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify here today on S. 3045 which would establish the Kenai Mountains-Turnagain Arm National Forest Heritage Area in the State of Alaska. In previous testimony before this Subcommittee on similar legislation, the Administration has consistently recommended that the Committee defer action on proposed heritage area designations until national program legislation is enacted that establishes guidelines and a process for the designation of national heritages areas. We still support that position and recommend that the Committee defer action on S. 3045. The Administration appreciates the strong community advocacy for designation of the Kenai Mountains-Turnagain Arm National Forest Heritage Area. If feasible, this designation would recognize the nationally significant history of the Kenai Peninsula by providing for the interpretation of the history and culture of the area. This designation upon a determination of feasibility would also facilitate public enjoyment of these resources, and would foster cooperative planning and partnerships among communities, and State and Federal governments.

S. 3045 would designate 1,217,600 acres on the Kenai Peninsula as a National Forest Heritage Area. Modeled after other National Heritage Areas administered by the National Park Service, this would be the first to be administered by the Forest Service. Eighty-nine percent of the lands within the proposed boundaries are within the Chugach National Forest. The proposed heritage area is also surrounded by the remainder of the Chugach's more than 5.3 million acres.

Like the National Park Service, the Forest Service values heritage resources and considers it part of the agency's mission to preserve and interpret them for the public. The Administration believes that the rich history, spectacular natural resource values, and community support merits the completion of a heritage area feasibility study that would allow for evaluation of the area prior to designation. Completion of a feasibility study for this heritage area would assure alignment with the management goals of the Chugach National Forest and provide a strong framework for collaborative management under which the significant historical resources of the area would thrive and grow. Information covering many of the criteria for national heritage area feasibility studies has been gathered in previous studies for the Iditarod National Heritage Trail and the Seward Highway National Scenic Byway. We recommend that a final feasibility analysis be prepared that would consolidate all this information into one document, make any final boundary adjustments that may be necessary, or identify any unknowns. We would be willing to work with the Committee on the scope of ~~the~~ ^{such an} analysis.

Section 5 of the bill would designate a local non-profit coordinating entity to develop and implement a management plan for the heritage area. Section 6 would require the entity to submit the management plan to the Secretary of Agriculture for approval or disapproval. The management plan would be consistent with the applicable Federal, State, borough, and local plans.

Section 7(a) would direct the Secretary of Agriculture to enter into a memorandum of understanding with the Secretary of the Interior to establish a general framework for cooperation and consultation in the review and implementation of the management plan. The Forest Service and the National Park Service will work cooperatively to support this community-based effort.

Section 7(c) would require the Secretary of the Interior to include the heritage area in nationwide releases, listings, and maps developed by the National Park Service about

national heritage areas. The Administration recognizes the advantages and efficiencies to be gained by this requirement.

Section 8 of the bill would provide that all laws applicable to the Federal, Tribal, State, local, or private lands in the designated area would continue to apply. As part of the extensive public involvement in developing the revised Land Management Plan for the Chugach National Forest, the Forest Service worked directly with proponents of the heritage area to incorporate goals and objectives into the plan that express the mutual interest in protecting and interpreting the cultural resources of the Kenai Peninsula. The local coordinating entity has worked tirelessly to bring the concept of a heritage area for this part of Alaska into reality. The Administration supports its energy and enthusiasm, as it dovetails with Forest Service support for local communities on the Kenai Peninsula.

In conclusion Mr. Chairman, should S. 3045 be enacted to include a feasibility study that meets applicable standards for other heritage areas and provides Congress with the necessary information and assessment upon which to base its decision regarding designation in the future, the Forest Service looks forward to working with you, the local coordinating entity, and the National Park Service to carry out the intent of the amended bill. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.